

New Year, New You: Productivity Secrets for 2016

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A new year has dawned and you've discovered there are still only 24 hours in a day. You long ago plucked all the low-hanging fruit when it comes to personal productivity, but you're still finding it a challenge to get everything done – even after delegating, listing daily goals, batching phone calls, getting up at the crack of dawn and automating every process you can.

How are you possibly going to achieve even more during business hours in 2016? By thinking outside the box.

Here are six left-field productivity hacks to try this year.

1. Watch More Cat Videos

Inevitably, there's been a scientific study into watching YouTube cat videos. The findings in Emotion regulation, procrastination, and watching cat videos online: Who watches Internet cats, why, and to what effect? were good news for business owners.

The analysis of nearly 7000 internet users (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563215004343>) found: "Happiness gained from viewing internet cats can moderate the relationship between procrastination, guilt and enjoyment." This suggests that if you're dreading a certain task, a happiness hit can be quickly derived from watching a feline skateboarding. That mood-lifting circuit breaker will then hopefully allow you to tackle the job at hand.

The broader point is that by allowing yourself – and your staff – to have some fur at work, you'll find that everyone is more productive.

2. Bring Your Dog into the Office

You may be aware that some large and mid-sized firms have started allowing staff to bring a furry friend to work. If your business can accommodate Fido or Fluffy, you'll find they act as magical stress relievers. And not just for their owners, but for everyone working in the business and even its customers and suppliers. A less-stressed workforce (and business owner) is a more productive one.

3. Jump on the Mindfulness Bandwagon

Organisations ranging from Google to the US Army have found that getting staff to meditate – or engage in meditative activities – results in greater calm, concentration and cooperation. Few small business owners have embraced the mindfulness revolution that's been sweeping the corporate world, but there's no good reason they can't start now. For a small outlay, you can arrange for a yoga or meditation teacher to come on-site and conduct an early morning or lunchtime class for you and your staff.

4. Give Standing (or Walking) Meetings Another Chance

Yes, we know you tried to encourage staff not to linger by taking the chairs out of your office for a while before giving up on the idea, but a recent Washington University study (<http://spp.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/06/12/1948550614538463.abstract>) found that a “non-sedentary workplace increases group arousal, while at the same time decreasing group idea territoriality, both of which result in better information elaboration and, indirectly, better group performance.”

In plain English, that means your meetings will be more collaborative and productive if you're in a vertical position while they are taking place.

5. Embrace Your Inner Swede

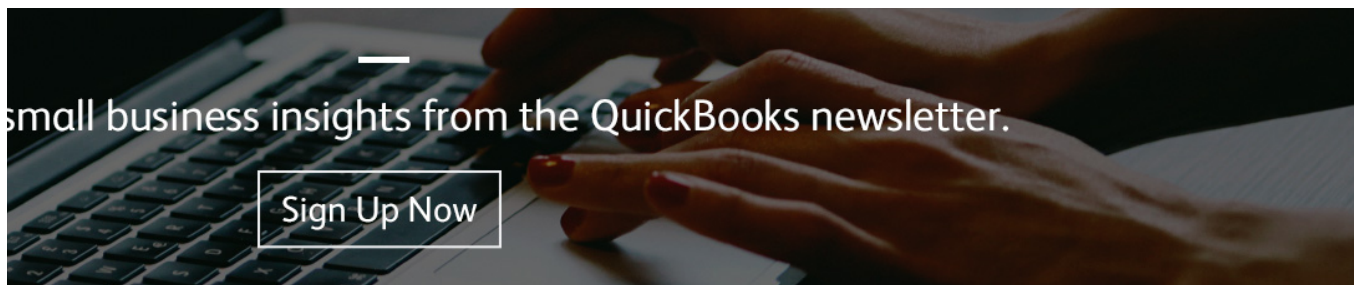
Sweden made headlines around the world in 2015 by trialling the six-hour day. (German companies got some media attention around the same time when they started banning after-hours email access.)

If you cut a working day from eight hours to six hours, you lose 25% productivity

right? It's still early days, but that's not how things seem to be working out. By and large, employees are getting as much done in six hours as they used to in eight. The lesson here is not necessarily that you should consider cutting your staff's hours, but that you should cut your own, which are almost certainly too long.

Burning the midnight oil may be necessary and effective for short bursts of time, but over the long haul it's counterproductive. If you decide you're going to leave work at a reasonable hour, you'll be surprised at how much you manage to power through knowing you've got a deadline. You'll also start the next day feeling far more energetic and focused.

6. Stop Multi-tasking



(<http://www.intuit.com.au/r/expert-advice-straight-to-your-inbox-2/>)

Think you're tripling your personal efficiency by gesturing to a staff member to fix the photocopier while talking to a customer on the phone and deleting spam emails? It doesn't matter whether you're male or female, trying to do multiple things at once – or constantly switching from task to task – is not an efficient use of your time. You may no longer feel like a high-powered entrepreneur, but methodically working through your to-do list one item at a time will result in you making fewer mistakes and getting more done.

If you're anything like the typical small business owner, you've probably spent a lot of time trying to increase your output by extending your hours and attempting to pack more and more into the day. These ideas might seem a little kooky, but test them out this year and see the results.



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